

COLLABORATEURS.

By S. D. SCHULTZ.

CHAPTER II. (Continued.)

ARCHER was tempted to treat White's request with levity; but it would have been cruel to jest, as his manner was too serious to admit of that, and besides he was not given to simulation.

White's letter induced Seymour to indulge a similar idea. The latter was pulling away at a corn-cob half-filled with the ashes of a previous smoke, and asking himself whether he should also write. "I didn't act altogether properly," he reflected, "but she might have stretched a point and forgiven me. When we were leaving the station, I looked everywhere for her pretty face, and she must have purposely remained away." Seymour, piqued at the remembered slight, emptied the ashes out of his pipe by viciously striking it upon the tire of the wagon wheel against which he was leaning. His show of temper was only momentary, though, and his eyes assumed a far-away dreamy look. Seymour's thoughts had wandered back to the scene at Union Station, Toronto, upon the departure of the Queen's Own Rifles and Grenadiers for the North-West. The Queen City people were proud of their two regiments, and there were few dry eyes, and many a fervently uttered "God speed you, my boys," from bent, gray-headed forms. Friends came for a last fond look, and a hurried hand-shake. It was not an occasion for calculating reserve, and the assembled host of people sympathized with those who could not control their feelings. Sweethearts clung to their soldier-lovers, nothing abashed. What cared they, though the eyes of the gaping multitude noted their loving embraces. And now the whistle gives three short shrieks. There is a sudden lurch forward, an explosive grunt from the smoke-stack, a hiss of escaping steam, and the wheels are grinding the rails with the well known rumbling sound. Amid hurraing crowds and waving kerchiefs, with the swelling chorus of "Litoria" from a thousand student throats, the train rushes out of the station, and Seymour struggled with a choking lump in his throat, as he stood on the rear of the car, straining his eyes at the rapidly receding city, until a sharp curve blotted everything from view. He had prayed for just one glimpse of the one he loved, and that had been denied.

Archer was a non-belligerent, though he had identified himself with the ambulance corps, and received some instructions in the way of dressing and bandaging wounds. He fully intended to assist in the carrying of stretchers, or in any other way that he might be called upon to render service to the sick and maimed.

Hardly a sound was heard in camp. In the east, appeared a faint glow, like the reflection of some distant conflagration, and soon after a rim of the refulgent disc of night peeped over the plains. The rim enlarged to a segment, and finally a circular shield of burnished bronze was lifted clear of the horizon.

Archer was lying on his back, puffing rings of smoke into the stilly air, and gazing drowsily at the moon, majestically describing an arc as it drifted on its upward way. His thoughts were shifting through the various phases of the rebellion, and the probable outcome. Would Canada be able to quell the dissatisfied half-breeds without the aid of Great Britain? The outbreak had assumed serious proportions. At first it was suggested that Quebec would sympathize with Riel, but the Victoria Rifles of Montreal bravely responded to Canada's "call to arms," and from St. Lawrence to the Gulf of Georgia, there was a fellow-feeling and a common desire to aid in suppressing the disgruntled half-breeds and their copper-colored supporters.

Archer's eyes had closed. The pipe stem had slipped from his mouth. Once more Pine Bay and Ethel. Once more the hotel balcony. Oh! what rapture, to gaze into her eyes, to be privileged to hold her hand! But she is leaving him, with a sad, pitying look in her face, and now he tries to follow, but something holds him back. He is straining, tugging—frantically, agonizingly striving to rise from his chair. He gnashes his teeth in rage, savagely, furiously cursing the mysterious force chaining him to his seat. He can just discern Ethel's form on the further shore. Now she fades from sight. His ears are buzzing. A mist gathers in his eyes. Horrors! something is clutching his throat. He is suffocating.

"Archer, don't look scared to death. What were you dreaming about? Something creepy, I'll gamble. I found you digging your claws into the ground in a perfect frenzy. I seized you by the collar, and tried to roll you over on your side. You were lying on your back. You seemed to be possessed of the strength of a demon. A nice fellow. Look at your meerschaum smashed into a thousand pieces." Archer, on awakening, sat up dazed, looking as if he were going to faint, and trembling violently. He passed his hand over his face and wiped away the cold perspiration that was running into his eyes, causing a smarting feeling, which he further irritated by rubbing.

"Archer, we haven't much time. We'll be off in a few minutes. Here's a letter. Will you kindly forward it?"

Archer jumped to his feet, determined to shake off the nervousness induced by the hideous nightmare.

"There seems to be a regular letter-sending epidemic. I'll see to it, though,

Seymour," responded Archer, taking the envelope and hastily slipping it into his pocket.

Archer and Seymour had struck up a friendship. In the long tramp over the melting snow and ice along the shores of Lake Superior, Seymour contracted a severe cold, and could hardly keep up with his comrades. Archer often carried his rifle, and frequently helped him over a difficult portage. At Port Arthur, Seymour suffered a slight attack of fever, and the surgeon was half-inclined to send him home, but he begged permission to accompany the troops. Archer nursed him through a short illness, and Seymour never lost an opportunity of proving his gratitude.

A start was soon made, and the train of forty-five waggons, carrying rations and stores, threaded its way over the undulating prairie, looking like a ghostly caravan of the desert.

At daybreak, the enemy's camp was sighted, situated upon the higher of two hills. A ravine with a small creek running through it almost encircled their position, which had been well selected for the purposes of strategy and defence. The advance was made as noiselessly as possible. Poundmaker did not look for an attack. His spies had informed him that Col. Otter's column had camped en route, and he never reckoned on a night march. The braves were wrapped in the dreamless slumber that comes when wearied with the feverish tossings of the night. Pity to awaken them. Many would sleep in the happy hunting grounds of eternity. The Indian sentinel paced to and fro, all unconscious of the soldiers stealthily creeping along in the faint light of dawn. A coyote barked in an adjacent copse. The Cree picket pricked his ear. There was something wrong—he could not tell what. He paused and listened, on the alert with anxious eye and receptive ear. His heart throbbed against his buckskin tunic in an agony of suspense. A startled prairie hen shot into the air and buzzed into a clump of poplar. A hawk circled skywards from a lofty perch on a cottonwood limb. The sentinel did not doubt now. There was a lurking danger. In a flash, his ear was strained to the ground. Breathlessly, he listened. Yet his suspicions were too true. He heard the tread of horses and men, swishing through the tangle of grass and stubble with a sage brush. A fallen bough broke with a sharp, strident snap. A soldier stumbled over it. Both barrels of a muzzle-loader were discharged in rapid succession, and the shots, emphasized the previous deathly silence, rang out with startling clearness, and detonated from hill to hill.

Before the echo of the report had died in the distant stretch of prairie,